

Governor's Proposed FY23 Budget Adjustments
Erin Williamson, LCSW, MPA, Vice President of Global Programs and Strategy
Love146
Appropriations Committee, February 16th, 2022

Love146 is providing the following testimony in support of the Governor's inclusion of funding for victim services in his proposed budget, funding intended to fill the urgent gap that is left by the reduction in federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding.

Love146's Survivor Care Program provides critical services to child victims of trafficking throughout the state of Connecticut. In 2016, Love146 was able to expand the number of children we serve with the support of VOCA funding. This funding was renewed and increased in 2018, allowing Love146 to again expand services. After serving over 600 youth and despite increases in VOCA funding, Love146 continues to maintain a waitlist of children who need care. Each child in our program and on our waitlist is a child who has experienced some of the worst violence imaginable. In addition to human trafficking, 63% of the children we have served had experienced child sexual abuse/rape, 44% child physical neglect, 28% child physical abuse, 28% domestic violence in the home, and 21% child pornography.

Given these significant histories of victimization, it is no surprise that victims of child sex trafficking have statistically higher clinical problems (emotional, developmental, psychological, and behavioral dysregulation), greater levels of trauma symptoms, more functional impairments and risk behaviors, and increased system involvement when compared to a matched sample of sexually assaulted/abused children. As a result, the specialized services offered by Love146 are critical to addressing the unique experiences and needs of this population. The services offered by Love146 include but are not limited to: crisis intervention, safety planning, information and referral services, advocacy, counseling, application assistance, appointment accompaniment, court/trial preparation/assistance, and transportation. An independent evaluation found youth describe Love146 as a model program, with comforting staff that were highly involved in their care, did not judge them, asked them for their opinions and input, and offered unconditional support.

The reduction in VOCA funding at the Federal level does not reflect a reduction in the number of victims needing services. In fact, the needs of victims have been exacerbated in recent years as our children have experienced a plethora of trauma and our nation experiences a crisis in children's mental health. If there was ever a year for the state to recognize and invest in the needs of victims it is this year, when the needs are so significant, and the financial resources are available.

As with many other victim service providers, without the financial support offered in this budget, intended to fill the urgent gap that is left by the reduction in VOCA funding, Love146 will have to significantly reduce the services we are able to offer crime victims. Our children, especially those who have experienced the trauma of victimization, need us to do what is right and ensure that they receive the services and support that they so desperately need and deserve. As such, we at Love146 are asking you to join us in supporting the inclusion of funding for victim services in the budget in order to provide for our children.